

DC Historic Preservation Plan 2015

Public Meeting and Working Session

Charles Sumner School
September 13, 2011

REPORT OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

Attendees at the September 13, 2011 public meeting and working session on the forthcoming DC Historic Preservation Plan split into separate groups and were asked to discuss successful aspects of historic preservation in DC, as well as unresolved challenges. The groups reported the results of their discussions at the end of the period, and the collective comments are presented below.

Successes

Preservation Law and Process

- Strong preservation law, among the strongest in the nation
- 2006 amendments to the preservation law were positives
- Preservation has won! So the city now engages in preservation routinely
- Landmarking process works well
- Good number of designated resources
- Design review runs smoothly and the permit process works, especially for professionals

Community Organizations and Partnerships

- Partnerships are working well
- Communities have a good relationship with HPO
- Active neighborhood groups are important
- Cultural Tourism has a good model for engaging the public
- Organizations like DCPL and Cultural Tourism are good at introducing newcomers to preservation
- Grant programs through the Humanities Council of DC and others are strengths
- Preservation award programs are successful and well-attended

Talented People

- DC staff and professionals in the field are talented and effective
- The same can be said for DC's national organizations—and volunteers!

Attitudes to Preservation

- Strong appreciation of historic preservation

Communication

- Online information about historic buildings is helpful

Email communication works well
HPO is very informative on preservation issues
Email announcements from HPO about specific actions are useful

Public Education

Markers and historic district signs work well to increase awareness and interest in preservation
Realtor training has been effective

Design Guidelines

Design guidelines are good, including neighborhood-specific design guidelines
Design guidelines are critical in understanding neighborhoods and implementing regulations
Guidelines facilitate the process for building alterations in historic districts—a “how-to” model for neighborhoods
Guidelines raise the comfort level of living in a historic district

Sustainability

Green movement is a positive for preservation
HPO has given good guidance for green projects
There are good guidelines on sustainability and new technologies

Successful Projects

Eastern Market
Old Naval Hospital—especially as a model for public engagement
Sensitive new development along 14th Street

Challenges

Perceptions of Preservation

Negative perception of preservation is an issue
There is a negative perception of some aspects of historic preservation
Attitudes have been reduced to platitudes (like “I can’t replace my windows”)
There is a perception that the review process is an impediment for individuals
Anti-development preservation gives preservation a bad name
Windows are the bête noire of the preservation movement

Community Organizations and Partnerships

The next generation of preservation leaders is not there
The organization of neighborhood groups needs improvement
Future activists—where are they?
Non-taxpaying entities (like the federal government) should contribute to DC preservation incentives and services

Access to Information

We need more comprehensive preservation information
There is a need for shared information through neighborhoods
There should be better connectivity to technical resources via the web
We need to get information out to property owners (Alexandria sends a letter out every year)
We need to keep people informed and expand the reach of communications

We should have a web-based interactive inventory with current photographs

Public Education and Outreach

We need to educate communities on “what is preservation” and neighborhood history

There should be more interpretation of historic sites

We need more interpretation of the historic preservation process

More information on “how to” would be helpful

There is a lack of awareness of archaeology

We need better methods to educate and engage citizens in the preservation process

How do we expand the reach of information—through networking?

We need more publicity and more accessible information, including plaques, web links, and printed documents

There should be better distribution to listserves

We should expand outreach efforts

Some communities are underserved

We need to expand historic preservation programs and involvement beyond Northwest and the same people

We need to work on engaging neighborhoods with potential historic properties

We need to engage public and elected officials

We need to engage and educate a transient population about DC’s past

Engaging Youth

We’re not communicating well about what preservation is, especially to the younger generation

Better youth education and outreach is needed

We should engage children and youth—in education and action

We should work to create an HP trade school or HP trade education in DC schools—and to create jobs

Communication and Coordination

Communications between review agencies and players are a challenge

We need a coordinated schedule with design review agencies

We need better engagement with ANCs, the public, and elected officials

We need more clarity on determinations of eligibility and revisiting of designation boundaries

More communication is always good

Preservation Processes

Lack of transparency in Mayor’s Agent’s decisions is an issue

Conflict of interest is a policy challenge with the Mayor’s Agent process

Stronger appointments to HPRB are needed

We need a strong HPRB that can deal with large projects

Implementing the “city 106” process for review of DC projects is a challenge—agencies are unaware of it

Threatened Resources

We need to improve advocacy for and preservation of our Modern buildings

Modernism has been addressed, but it needs more depth

Historic landscapes, parks, and vistas are ignored

Cemeteries and trails should be recognized as historic resources and designated

We need to deal with campus plans and expansion
We should recognize cultural artifacts as well as buildings

There is a need for protection of communities without designation, because of density and zoning pressures
Undesignated historic districts are at risk
We need more surveys and updated information
It is difficult to designate new historic districts
We should work to designate small, interested areas as a first step to preserving a larger historic district

Preservation Tools

We need a range of preservation options and tools
We need tools beyond historic district designation
We need short, medium, and long-term goals that are measurable
The “weaponization” of landmarking is a negative

Financial Incentives

There is a need for DC historic tax credits or other financial incentives

Enforcement and Demolition by Neglect

Enforcement and lack of staff coverage for enforcement are issues
We need more staff and more awareness to combat demolition by neglect
Vacant properties are a problem, including properties owned by non-profits and government
The demolition by neglect regulation is not effective; we need a better law to be able to implement it
Enforcement rules are not understood
We need stronger enforcement